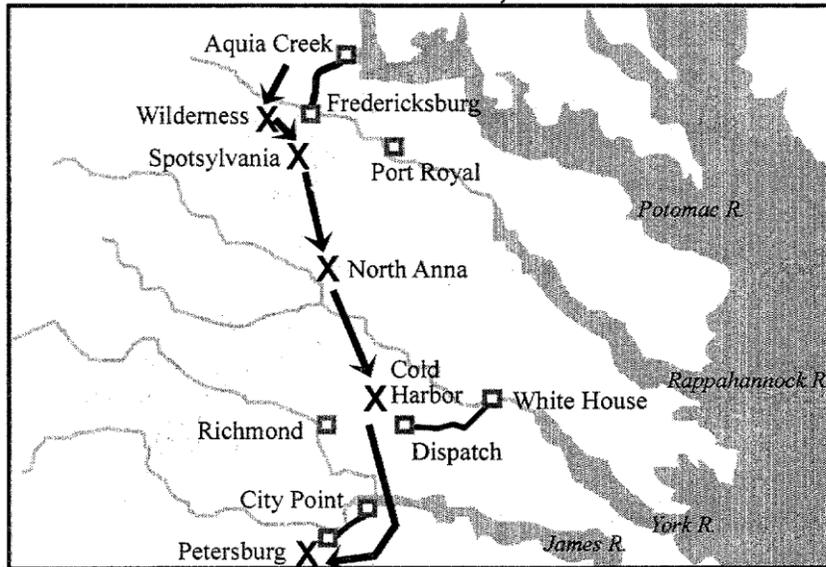


GRANT'S CAMPAIGN, 1864



Map 12

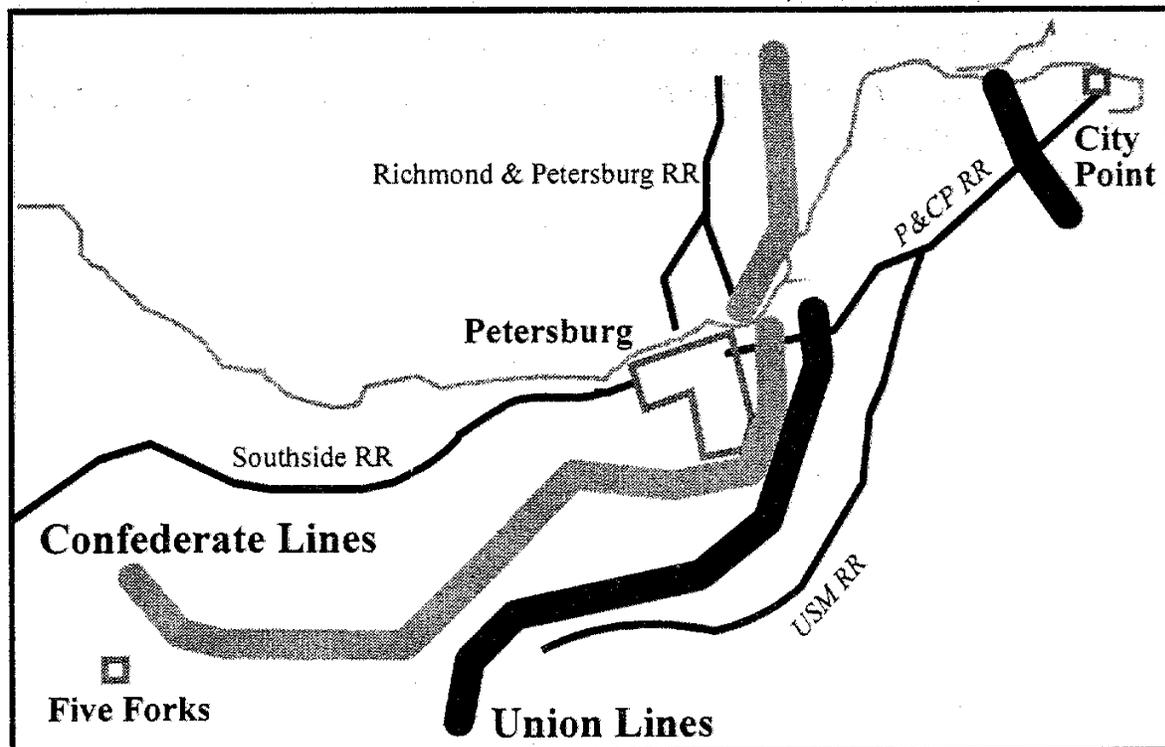
In 1864, the USMRR allowed Grant's army in Virginia to finally crack the Rappahannock River line and drive toward Richmond. During the Wilderness and Spotsylvania battles, Grant relied on the old Aquia Creek line of supply. He then shifted his base to Port Royal on the Rappahannock where water transport served as his line of communications. Upon moving south from the North Anna River toward Cold Harbor, Grant directed elements of Major General Benjamin Butler's Army of

the James to occupy White House on the Pamunkey River (a tributary of the York River) deep in enemy territory (see map 12). The USMRR opened and operated a section of the Richmond and York River Railroad from White House to Dispatch. Grant then *advanced toward* this new supply base. Later, when Grant passed south of the James River, the USMRR put the City Point and Petersburg Railroad into operation (see map 13). In the ensuing months, as Grant's army extended its siege lines south and west around Petersburg, the USMRR laid new track to facilitate supply of the Union left wing. Grant's army, supplied by one jerrybuilt but professionally operated railroad, fared better logistically than did Lee's Confederates in Petersburg, who had several preexisting rail lines at their disposal.

What of the Confederates? They too relied heavily on railroads at both the strategic and tactical levels and conducted many noteworthy troop movements in the course of the war. However, the Confederacy began the war with a fragmented and incomplete rail system (9,000 miles, as opposed to 20,000 miles in the north). Unlike the Union, the Confederacy lacked the manufacturing capacity to expand, or even maintain, its railroad infrastructure once the fighting began. Moreover, it was not until February 1865 that the Confederate government asserted its authority over the railroads. For most of the war, military traffic moved only at the discretion of civilian railroad managers. There was no Confederate equivalent of Thomas A. Scott or John W. Garrett who possessed both the expertise and the authority to mesh military requirements with corporate capabilities. There was no Confederate Herman A. Haupt to institutionalize and enforce the procedures for effective tactical rail operations, and no Confederate Military Rail Roads to operate lines in immediate support of the armies. The Confederate military rail effort operated under all of the problems that plagued its Union counterpart, but it lacked the expert, centralized guidance that enabled Union railroads to do their job. One example serves to illustrate the point: during the winter of 1863-64, when the Union Army of the Potomac subsisted happily on the deliveries of the Aquia Creek line, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia suffered hunger, even though it had a direct, thirty-mile rail link to the national capital. Supplies for the troops were available, but the Confederate authorities could not get them to the front.

Clearly, the railroad was a major factor in shaping strategy during the Civil War. Railroads dictated the strength and direction of many military operations. Railroads may have helped to protract the war by making it difficult to win battles of annihilation. And Union superiority in railroad generalship provided the logistical foundation for the campaigns of 1864 and 1865 that doomed the Confederacy to defeat.

PETERSBURG OPERATIONS, 1864-65



Map 13

The railroad remained a vital element of military science after Appomattox. When we look ahead in time and across the ocean to the outbreak of World War I, we find that Germany's Schlieffen Plan and France's Plan XVII consisted largely of highly detailed railroad timetables for the mobilization and deployment of troops. In a very real sense, railway transportation was no longer just a part of strategy, it had become strategy in its own right. The American Civil War was the first conflict in which railroads played a dominant role, thus introducing to the world a military instrument that changed the face of warfare forever.